Historical Context, Existing Conditions, and Future Conditions – Technical Memorandum (FINAL)

Client:	Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District
Project:	Rail Corridor Planning Study
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Contents

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1. Introduction

The Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD) and the Hupačasath and Tseshaht First Nations have initiated the ACRD Rail Corridor Planning Study. The study will explore opportunities for use of the Island Rail Corridor within the ACRD, and in collaboration with other Regional Districts and First Nations along the Island Rail Corridor across Vancouver Island.

The study will review the historical context, existing and future conditions of the Island Rail Corridor, engage with the public and stakeholders, identify regional needs and opportunities, and develop a vision for the Island Rail Corridor in full collaboration with the Hupačasath and Tseshaht First Nations.

This technical memorandum begins with an overview of the study area and identification of the governing bodies and regional stakeholders. It includes a summary of HDR's understanding of the corridor history, including how the corridor lands were acquired and how the corridor was first developed and used through the decades. It then includes an overview of the existing conditions on the corridor and in the region, including planning context, recent studies of the corridor, overview of the current corridor conditions, and of the overall transportation network and pertinent operations. The memorandum also includes a brief identification of future conditions and trends regarding how the region is expected to change, and thus the opportunities available for corridor use.

1.1 Study Area

Figure 1 shows the 29 km portion of the Port Alberni Subdivision that exists within the ACRD from milepost (MP) 39 (Port Alberni) to MP 21 (at the ACRD boundary). The segment exists primarily on the north side of Highway 4, and on the western extents turns north-south and extends into Port Alberni and to the east side of the Alberni Inlet. This segment of rail historically provided transportation for local businesses in Port Alberni, most notably the paper mill.

Figure 2 shows the broader study area and rail corridor from Port Alberni to Nanaimo. The Port Alberni Subdivision continues from MP 21 (at the ACRD boundary) to MP 0 (Parksville) where it connects to the Victoria Subdivision. This segment has been left unused for several decades. From Parksville (MP 96) to Nanaimo (MP 70) the corridor utilizes the Victoria Subdivision, which is the main North-South rail corridor on the island. From MP 70, the Wellcox Spur extends a further 2 miles back toward the Port of Nanaimo and Wellcox Yard. The yard is the primary operations hub for rail operations on the island and is the key collection point for freight carloads moving to/from the Lower Mainland via rail barge operations on the island.

The study will conder opportunities for corridor use both within the ACRD and for the entire rail corridor between Port Alberni and Nanaimo (including the Duke Point area), as many improvement concepts (such as freight or passenger rail) would require the option to exist beyond the ACRD to be feasible.

Figure 1. ACRD Study Area & Rail Corridor

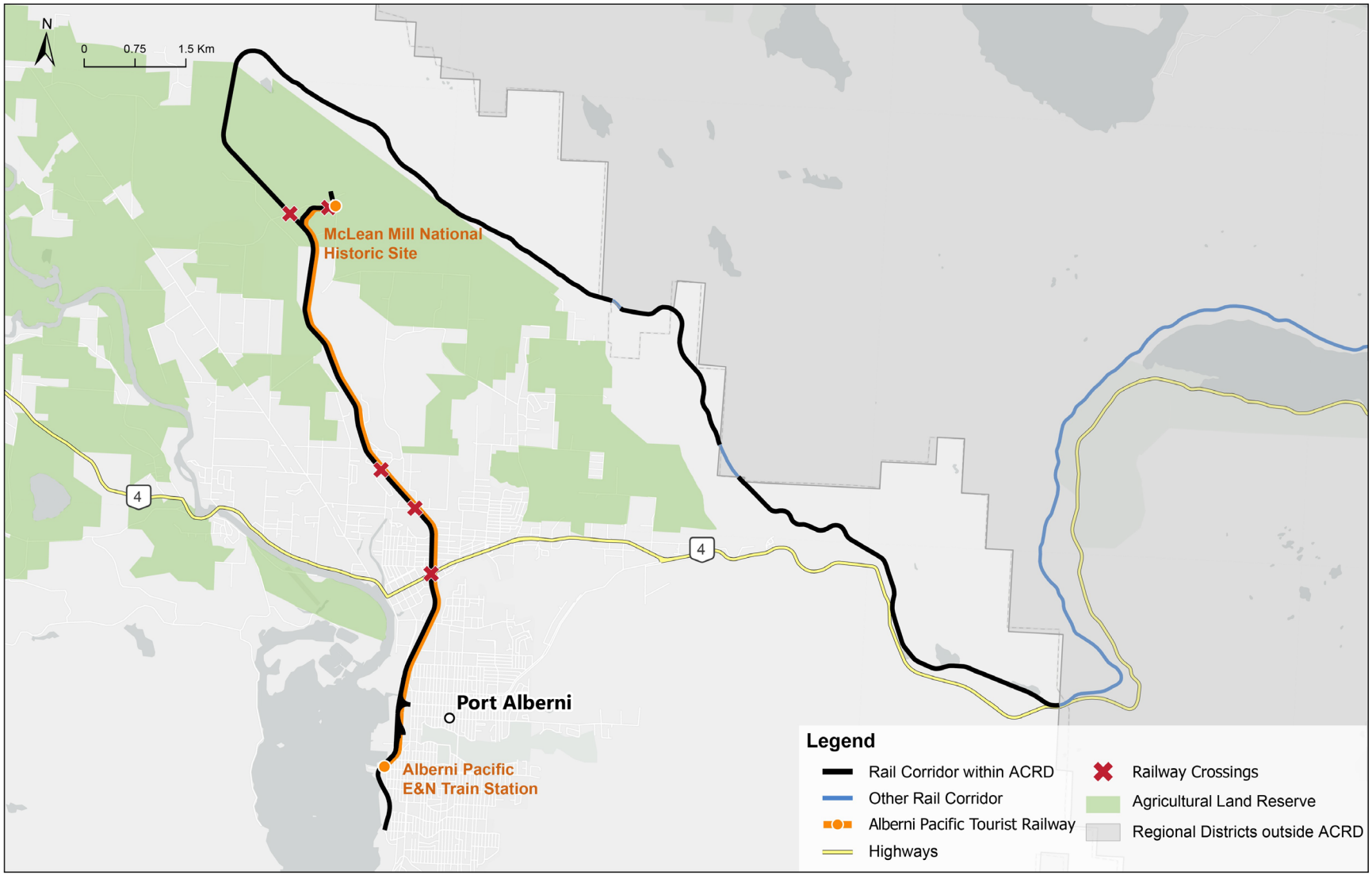
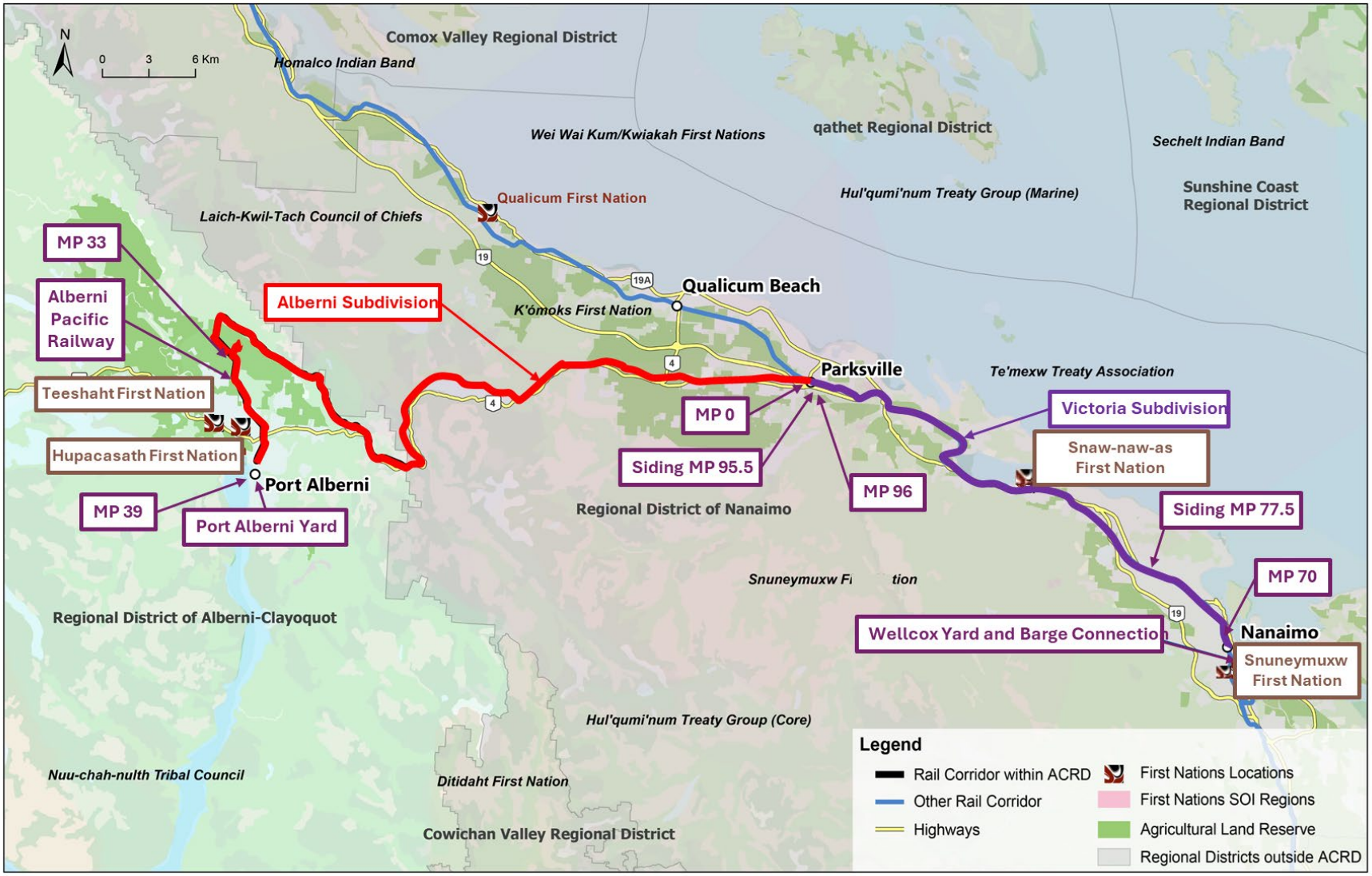


Figure 2. Broader Study Area & Rail Corridor



1.2 First Nation Communities

There are approximately 50 First Nation communities located within three district tribal regions on Vancouver Island (shown in **Figure 3**). The ACRD exists within the Nuu-chah-nulth Traditional Territory.

Hupačasath and Tseshaht First Nations are partners in this study as members of the Alberni Valley Rail Corridor Working Group (AVRCWG) along with ACRD and the City of Port Alberni. Other First Nation communities near the study corridor between Port Alberni and Nanaimo include Qualicum, Snaw-naw-as (Nanoose), and Snuneymuxw. Approximately 20% of people living along the ACRD corridor identify as Indigenous.[1] Brief summaries of the First Nations along the study corridor (between Port Alberni and Nanaimo) are described below.

Tseshaht First Nation
The *hahuulhi (*marine and terrestrial territories*)* of *c̓išaaʔatḥ* (present day Tseshaht) extends from Great Central Lake, Somass River watershed and Alberni Valley in the east, down the Alberni Inlet and surrounding lands to the Broken Group Islands of central Barkley Sound, and out to sea. Tseshaht holds Aboriginal title and rights within the *hahuulhi* of its *hawiih* (the hereditary chiefs of *c̓išaaʔatḥ, hikwuulhʔatḥ, hach`aaʔatḥ, hašʔasʔatḥ* and *maktlʔiiʔatḥ*). The Alberni Subdivision terminates within Tseshaht *hahuulhi* at the end of the Alberni Inlet within the City of Port Alberni.

Hupačasath First Nation
Hupačasath First Nation, part of the Nuu-chah-nulth, is an amalgamation of several tribes that predate European settlement. The traditional lands include the headwaters of the Ash and Elsie Rivers, east towards Port Alberni, and south along the Alberni inlet. These lands include Great Central and Sprout Lakes. Similar to the Tseshaht First Nation, the traditional lands surround the eastern most portion of the Alberni Subdivision.

Qualicum First Nation
The Qualicum First Nation currently has 77 hectares of reserve lands centered around the mouth of the Big Qualicum River. Although existing reserve lands are not directly on the rail corridor affected by this study, the Nation does border with the Victoria Subdivision northwest of Parksville.

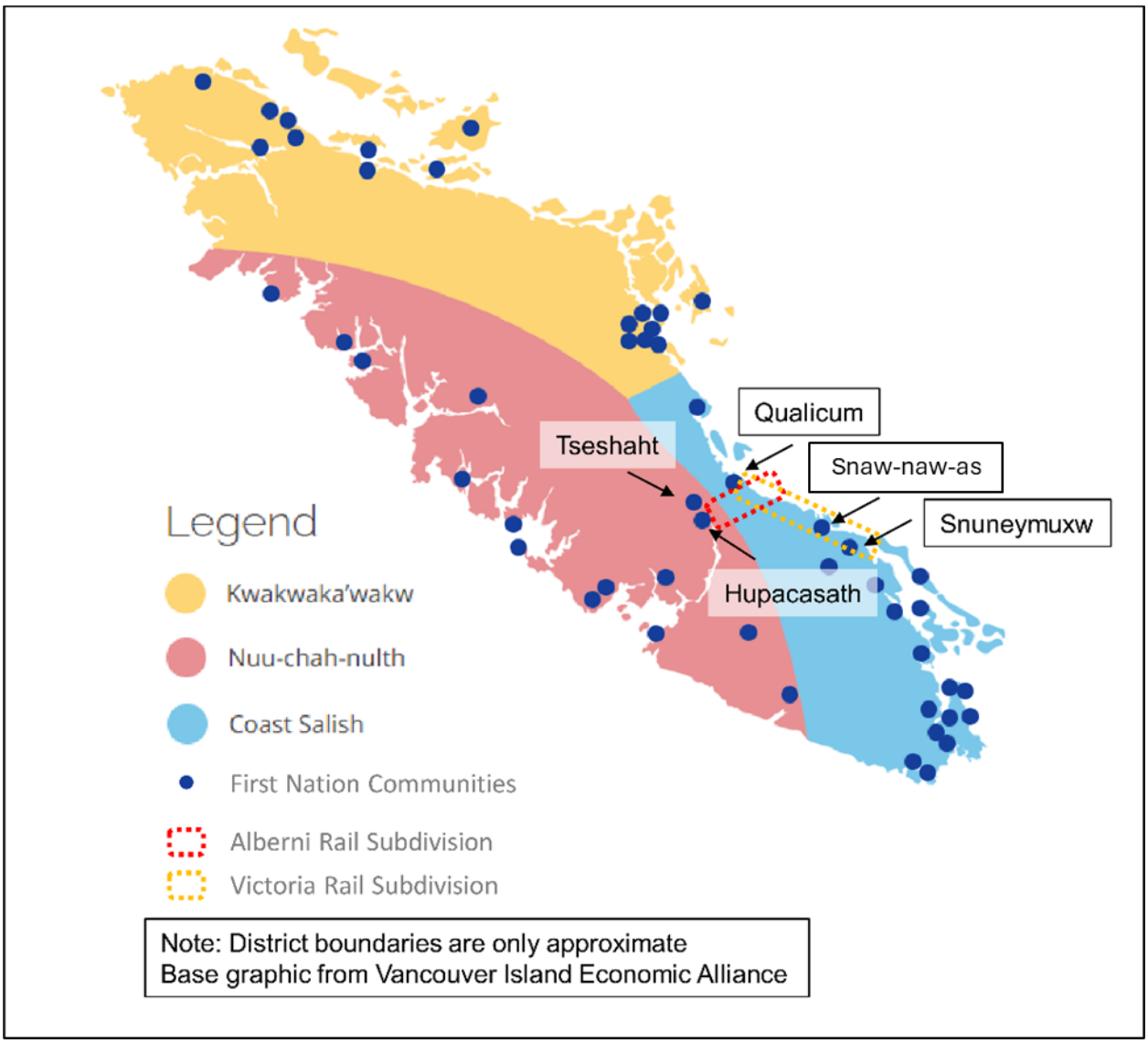
Snaw-naw-as (Nanoose) First Nation
Nanoose First Nation, known traditionally as Snaw-naw-as, are one of 18 tribes of the Coastal Salish People. Although tribal lands fall outside of ACRD boundaries, Nanoose First Nation traditional lands surround portions of the Victoria Subdivision which connect Port Alberni to Nanaimo.

Snuneymuxw First Nation
Snuneymuxw First Nation is one of 18 tribes of the Coastal Salish People. Traditional lands stretch across from the Fraser River on the Lower Mainland, including the Gulf Islands, and the

[1] https://www.islandhealth.ca/sites/default/files/alberni-clayoquot-local-health-area-profile.pdf

eastern portion of Vancouver Island. Current freight rail operations in Nanaimo overlap with the traditional lands of the Snuneymuxw.

Figure 3. First Nation Communities on Vancouver Island



Source Map: [Vancouver Island First Nations Map | VIEA]

2. History of the Corridor

The Island Rail Corridor, previously known as the E&N Railway, is the primary existing rail infrastructure asset on Vancouver Island. HDR researched the history of the rail corridor using a range of sources, and this section provides HDR's understanding of the history of the rail corridor from its inception to its modern status. This is first summarized in **Table 1**, and then described further in the following section.

Table 1: History of Rail Operations on Island Rail Corridor

Year	Historic Event
1849	The colony of Vancouver Island is formed with a few hundred European settlers.[2]
1858	The colony of British Columbia is founded in response to 30,000 settlers, mainly Americans, seeking fortunes in the Fraser River Gold Rush.[2]
1866	The colony of Vancouver Island merges with the colony of British Columbia.[2]
1867	The Dominion of Canada is formed and British Columbia is faced with the threat of American annexation because of the purchase of Alaska that same year.[2]
1871	British Columbia joins the Dominion of Canada on condition the federal government build a rail link to the Pacific Coast under the British North America Act.[4]
1882	Robert Dunsmuir is elected to the British Columbia (BC) Legislature.[3]
1883	Esquimalt and Nanaimo (E&N) Railway becomes incorporated after Robert Dunsmuir and Associates is selected as a building contractor.[4]
1884	April 30th, 1884, construction commences.[4]
1885	The Canadian Pacific Transcontinental Railway construction is completed providing a link from BC to Ottawa.[2]
1886	Rail service begins following the completion of 115 km (71 miles) between Esquimalt and Nanaimo on August 13, 1886. Then Prime Minister Sir John A. MacDonald drove the last spike.[4] The Canadian Federal Government cede approximately 300,000 ha of First Nations lands to the newly formed Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway (E&N) owned by Sir Robert Dunsmuir, then an elected official of the BC Legislature.[5]
1888	The E&N railway is extended to Victoria, BC after the city incorporates.[5]
1905	The E&N is sold to Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) with plans to extend the rail corridor north to Courtenay and west to Port Alberni.[5] CPR gained all rail assets and $2.5 M in land grants.[6] Eight passenger stations were to be constructed on the Port Alberni Subdivision and 36 stations on the Victoria Subdivision once completed.
1910	E&N rail operations between Wellington (Nanaimo), Parksville, and Cameron Lake commence on November 4th, 1910.[11]
1911	E&N rail operations between Cameron Lake and Port Alberni commence on December 9th, 1911, with the completion of the Port Alberni Subdivision.[7]

[2] British Columbia and Confederation | The Canadian Encyclopedia
[3] Robert Dunsmuir - Wikipedia
[4] CVRD Rail History, CVRD June 25, 2024
[5] Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment, MoTI 2020
[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNiAXDCPmPA&list=PL74V0-BZuSztj4ZtS2QmbG7nimiq-HTO_&index=6
[7] Island Rail Corridor - Wikipedia

Year	Historic Event
1914	E&N rail operations between Parksville and Courtenay commence on July 31st, 1914 with the completion of the Victoria Subdivision.[7]
1952	Canada Post transitions mail form passenger trains to motor vehicles reducing railroad revenue.[4]
1953	CPR passenger rail service ceases on Port Alberni Subdivision, but freight service continues.[7]
1978	VIA Rail Canada assumes responsibility for passenger rail services on the island from CPR (including service between Victoria, Nanaimo, and Courtenay).[7]
1996	CPR creates a new business unit "E&N Railfreight" (an internal shortline) to market and operate their Vancouver Island rail network.
1999	Shortline railway operator RailAmerica purchases the rail line from Nanaimo to Port Alberni from CPR. The remainder of rail lines remained under CPR ownership but are leased to RailAmerica. The new RailAmerica shortline is called the "E&N Railway Company".[7]
2002	In January, Norske Canada announces switch from rail to truck for their Port Alberni paper mill. RailAmerica ceases freight operations on the Port Alberni Subdivision on January 16th, 2002 with the last train departing Port Alberni for Nanaimo. Rail service continued on the Victoria Subdivision and Wellcox Spur.
2006	ICF takes over ownership of rail corridor from both CPR and RailAmerica. Southern Railway of Vancouver Island (SVI) appointed railway service provider by the ICF.[7]
2011	VIA passenger service entirely ceases on the entire Island Rail network because of deteriorating track infrastructure.[7]
2012	Freight rail service ceases on nearly the entire network. Limited operations (16 km) extending from Wellcox Yard into Nanaimo remain operational.[7]
2018	The Alberni Pacific Railway, operated by the Western Vancouver Island Industrial Heritage Society (WVIIHS), ceases after offering tourist train rides since 1984 on a short 1.3 km route through the city.[8]
2023	The Alberni Pacific Railway is given permission from the City of Port Alberni to resume passenger tourist service for a one year contract.[9]
2024	Alberni Pacific Railway resumes tourist passenger services on a short portion of track within Port Alberni.[10]

Prior to the formation of the Colony of Vancouver Island in 1849, Vancouver Island was home to approximately 50,000 First Nations people and a couple hundred settlers.[11] A gold rush in the Fraser River Valley sparked further colonial interest in the region in 1858 with the arrival of approximately 30,000 settlers, mainly from the United States. Colonial British Columbia set up a representative government in 1864 and later merged with Vancouver Island in 1866. After the purchase of Alaska in 1867, American influence in the region put pressure on British Columbia

[8] About Us | Alberni Pacific Railway
[9] Short track train passenger service coming back for 2024 | City of Port Alberni
[10] https://www.timescolonist.com/business/port-alberni-sightseeing-train-returns-this-month-9065983
[11] British Columbia and Confederation | The Canadian Encyclopedia

to join the newly formed Dominion of Canada. British Columbia officially joined the Dominion of Canada on July 21,1871.

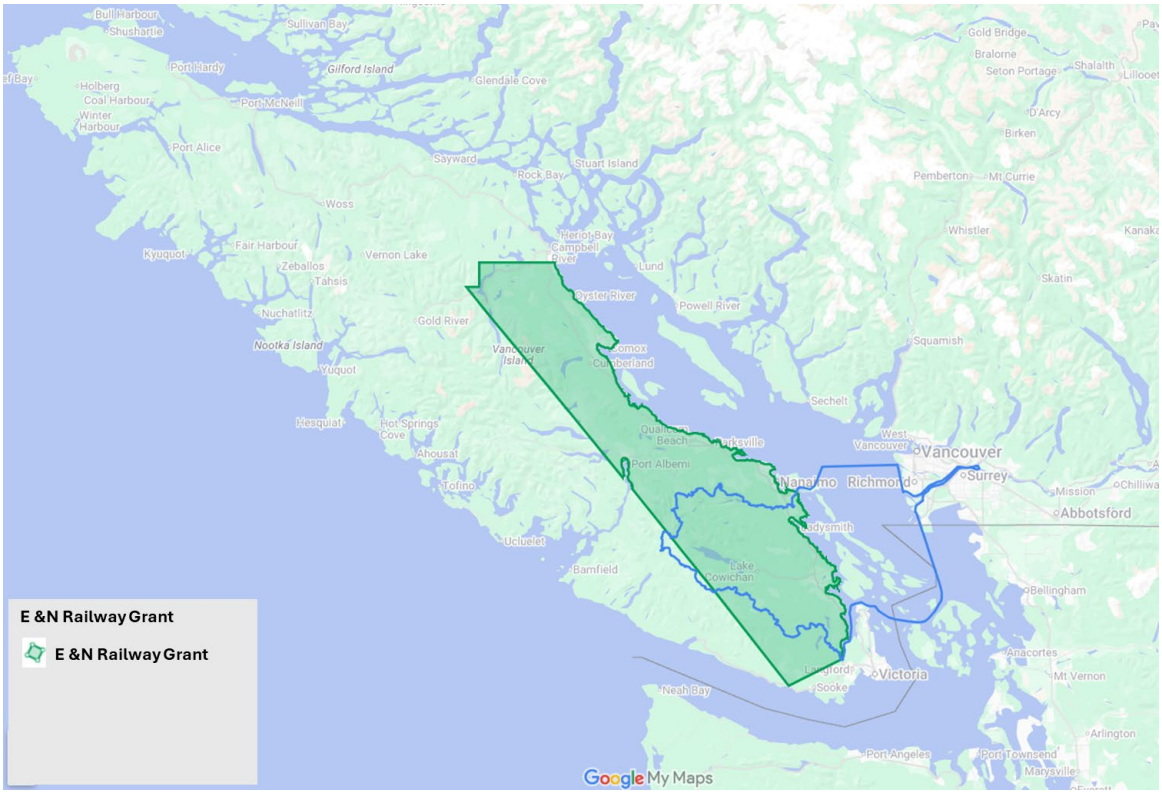
As a condition of Confederation, the Government of the Dominion committed to undertake the construction of a railway "to connect the seaboard of British Columbia with the railway system of Canada".[12] The route was originally proposed to reach the Pacific through the Yellowhead Pass, to Bute Inlet then to the Vancouver Island via Sonora and Quadra Islands and a bridge over the Seymour Narrows. Once on Vancouver Island, the route would follow the east coast with its terminus in Esquimalt. This plan was eventually abandoned in favour of the route via the Rogers Pass and Fraser Canyon to Vancouver.

As a result of this change in rail alignment and non-fulfillment of the terms of union with respect to building the railway, provincial threats of withdrawal from Confederation were made in 1874. Much provincial – federal negotiation ensued and eventually binding arbitration resulted in a ruling that a railway from Esquimalt to Nanaimo be constructed as soon as possible.

Robert Dunsmuir, then a member of the BC Legislature, submitted a proposal to the federal government and was granted the rights to construct the railway between Nanaimo and Esquimalt in 1886, known as the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway Company (E&N Railway). In exchange for constructing the railway, Dunsmuir secured large land grants for the purpose of developing natural resources on Vancouver Island. As a condition to joining the Dominion, approximately 800,000 hectares[13] of land along the proposed Vancouver Island railway line, lands not to exceed 20 miles on each side of the railway line, were federally granted to the newly formed E&N Railway, of which Robert Dunsmuir was president and a major shareholder. The E&N railway then began subdividing parcels on the island and selling them for profit. There was limited consideration of First Nations and their lands when building the E&N railway.[14] **Figure 4** below shows E&N Railway Grant.[14]

[12] Order of Her Majesty in Council admitting British Columbia into the Union. 16 May,1871. https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/constitution/lawreg-loireg/p1t41.html
[13] CIDADA - E&N Railway Grant - Google My Maps
[14] Vancouver Island's Great E & N Railway Land Grab | Watershed Sentinel

Figure 4. E&N Railway Grant



The Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia granted land to the E& N railroad with complete disregard for the rights of First Nations. Transfer of land from First Nations began in 1884 under the settlement act with additional grants in 1905 and 1913 which were collectively known as the E&N Land Grant. An approximate 2 million acres stretching 20-miles wide along the railroad right-of-way between Esquimalt and north of Campbell River was ceded by the Canadian government and transferred to the railroad upon completion of the rail line. The Indian Act of 1880 and the Consolidation Railway Act of 1879 were used to expropriate First Nation lands.

Construction of the railway began in two separate divisions: Division One starting from Esquimalt working north and Division Two starting from Nanaimo and working south. The construction contracts were also divided into these sections with a 50 mile contact south from Nanaimo and a 24 mile contract north from Esquimalt meeting each other along the east side of Shawnigan Lake. Surveying proceeded on May 7th, 1884 at the Esquimalt Indian Village at a point where a stake had been driven in 1875 at the proposed terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway.[15] Employing approximately 2,000 men and proceeding from both points allowed completion of the E&N railway slightly over one year. A ceremony, in which Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald drove the last spike, was held on August 13th, 1886.

The original 115 km route from Nanaimo to Esquimalt was extended to Victoria, BC in 1888. Shortly after, the E&N was sold to CPR and extended to Parksville and Courtenay. An extension of the rail line (Port Alberni Subdivision) from Parksville was also constructed. The line serviced

[15] Daily Colonist (1884-05-04) : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive

several industries in Port Alberni. Passenger service was offered on the entire network with the construction of 8 stations on the Port Alberni Subdivision and 36 stations on the Victoria Subdivision between Victoria and Courtenay.

Around 1960, Highway 4 was extended west towards Tofino. Tourists started favouring auto travel, which allowed them to continuously travel from the east side of Vancouver Island to the western coast. Port Alberni began to function as a layover place rather than a destination, which led to decreased passenger rail demand along the Alberni Subdivision corridor.[16]

In 1953, passenger services were terminated on the Port Alberni Subdivision but continued to operate under VIA rail between Victoria and Nanaimo from 1978 until 2011 when track conditions prohibited services from continuing. The Island Corridor Foundation (ICF), a nonprofit agency comprising a board of directors, 6 from regional districts and 6 from First Nations wholly or partly within the rail corridor, assumed management of property divested by what was then Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) and railroad holding company RailAmerica in 2006. ICF was the result of 14 First Nations and 5 Regional Districts working together to establish ICF for the purpose of safeguarding and enhancing the Vancouver Island rail corridor. ICF now contracts with Southern Railway of British Columbia (SRY) to operate and maintain the corridor. SRY is branded as SRY Rail Link and does business under the name of Southern Railway of Vancouver Island (SVI), which is a subsidiary of Washington Companies.

The decline of freight rail was particularly aggravated in 2001 when Norske Skog transferred 80% of their finished product volumes from rail to trucking. At the time CP had a monopoly over freight rail in the region and came in conflict with the new owners over shipping rates. Norske Skog started sending finished paper products by freight truck to the Lower Mainland where there were options to ship products by four different freight rail companies, thus providing more competitive shipping rates.[17]

Freight volumes on the Port Alberni Subdivision decreased, and nearly all freight rail operations on the island were curtailed by 2012, with deteriorating track conditions and lack of capital investment being cited as contributing factors. Outside of Wellcox Yard, where significant truck-rail transload occurs for numerous commodities, a single customer remains (Superior Propane) that receives rail service several times per week on the north side of Nanaimo.

Since the effective discontinuation of rail service on Vancouver Island, there has been some interest and studies in what it would take to revive either passenger or freight rail service. There have also been more niche examples of corridor use. For example, the Alberni Pacific Railway[18], which is operated by the Western Vancouver Island Industrial Heritage Society (WVIIHS), was given permission by the City of Port Alberni to operate a tourism passenger service for a one-year term on a 1.3 kilometer stretch of Alberni Subdivision in 2023. It is HDR's understanding that passenger service, which had increased in 2019, has been operating again since mid-2024. [19]

[16] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNiAXDCPmPA&list=PL74V0-BZuSztj4ZtS2QmbG7nimiq-HTO_&index=6
[17] Island Rail Corridor Freight Analysis, MoTI 2022
[18] Short track train passenger service coming back for 2024 | City of Port Alberni
[19] Train rides return to Port Alberni waterfront just in time for Canada Day | Port Alberni Valley News

The issues surrounding the aforementioned land grants remain largely unresolved to this day. Recently, First Nation groups across Vancouver Island have initiated land claim settlements that seek the reversion of Island Rail Corridor lands. The following description from the Government of Canada summarizes recent legal proceeds and actions.[20]

- *In 2015 the Snaw-Naw-As First Nation brought legal actions against Canada and Island Corridor Foundation (ICF), seeking the reversion of former Reserve Lands, indicating that the land which the Island Rail Corridor sits on were no longer being used for railway purposes. Subsequently in 2016 two additional court claims of the same nature were filed by the Cowichan Tribes and Halalt First Nation.*
- *The Cowichan Tribes and Halalt Nation actions are currently in abeyance while the Snaw-Naw-As First Nation action has gone forward.*
- *On the Snaw-Naw-As First Nation case, in September 2021, the Court of Appeal for British Columbia (BC) gave Canada until March 14, 2023 to determine if restoration is in the public interest, and whether it will fund restoration. If funding was not provided, or a decision was not made, Snaw-Naw-As could return to court seeking an order vesting the lands as Reserve lands.*
- *In Fall 2022, the BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure led engagement processes with First Nations and implicated stakeholders on the future of the corridor, as well as a freight analysis.*
- *On March 14, 2023 Transport Canada and the Province of BC issued a joint statement on the future of the Vancouver Island Rail Corridor outlining a decision that that reversion of the land bisecting the Snaw-Naw-As First Nation reserve is the first step in the process of developing a shared vision for the future of the corridor with First Nations.*

As a result of this claim, the province committed $18 million in funding to First Nations and Regional Districts to study their respective portions of the Island Rail Corridor and identify opportunities for corridor use.[21] This study is being conducted through the grant provided to the ACRD.

[20] Vancouver Island's Great E & N Railway Land Grab | Watershed Sentinel
[21] https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2023MOTI0030-000316

3. Existing Conditions

3.1 Planning Context

This section provides summaries of planning documents and studies that are relevant to the Island Rail Corridor and this study.

ACRD Official Community Plan (Area F – Cherry Creek)

The Official Community Plan (OCP) outlines the local governments' broad policy objectives, existing land use and servicing, and plans for changes to land use and servicing. The western portion of the Port Alberni Subdivision / E&N Railway is located within Cherry Creek (Area F) of the ACRD and is generally surrounded by resource land. The Cherry Creek OCP provides direction to the ACRD on the future development within this planning area. The ACRD serves a population of approximately 33,000 people (as of 2024) over 6,500 km^2 and comprises of six electoral districts, each with their own OCP.

Regional District of Nanaimo Official Community Plan (Electoral Area F)

The eastern portion of the Port Alberni Subdivision is located within the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN). As of 2021, the District has a population of approximately 172,000 people. The Port Alberni Subdivision spans the Errington, Coombs & Hilliers area (Electoral Area F) in the RDN. Within Electoral Area F, the land uses surrounding the Port Alberni Subdivision closer to the ACRD are generally Park Lands, Forest Land Reserve Resource Lands, and Crown Land Resource Lands. Near Parksville, the land uses are generally Agricultural Land Reserve Resource Lands. The OCP provides a comprehensive set of objectives and policies that reflect community values for existing and future land uses.

Port Alberni Official Community Plan

Port Alberni is the largest commercial hub within the ACRD and has a population of over 18,000 people as of 2024. Near the Island Rail Corridor, the surrounding land uses are generally residential, general commercial and industrial. The Port Alberni OCP identifies the long-term vision and goals to guide the growth of Port Alberni for decision-making matters related to land use, infrastructure, transportation, and community services.

CleanBC

CleanBC is the provincial plan to lower emissions by 40% by 2030, and transportation is an area of change identified in CleanBC's Roadmap to 2030 to achieve a more sustainable future. A shift to energy efficient travel modes can reduce emissions and can include passenger rail for personal travel and freight rail for commercial deliveries. Reinstating rail service between Port Alberni and Parksville can offer alternative mode choices for all travel purposes.

South Island Transportation Strategy

The South Island Transportation Strategy provides an integrated transportation strategy to accommodate sustainable growth on the southern portion of Vancouver Island, and connect people, services and goods sustainability and reliably. While the ACRD and study area are not technically within the South Island, the goals of improving the transportation network safety, reliability, sustainability and connectivity, including access to non-auto modes of transportation, are likely applicable to the ACRD and relevant to this study.

3.2 Recent Studies

There have been several recent studies and planning documents that addressed freight rail needs and opportunities on the Island Rail Corridor network. A chronological summary of relevant studies reviewed is provided in **Table 2**. Additional details of these studies are documented in this section.

Table 2. Studies and Reports Evaluating Reinstating Rail Operations on Vancouver Island

Year	Study / Report	Agency	Study Extents	Description
2010	Evaluation of the E&N Railway Corridor: Foundation Report*	MoTI	Entire island rail corridor	Evaluation on viability of intercity passenger service or tourism on rail corridor.
2010	Evaluation of the E&N Railway Corridor: Freight Analysis	MoTI	Entire island rail corridor	Includes freight demand along the corridor, operating costs, and future markets.
2010	E&N Railway Corridor Development Strategies for the Island Corridor Foundation	MoTI	Entire island rail corridor	Long-term rail corridor strategies for passenger, commuter, and freight operations. Cost projections included track rehabilitation.
2020	Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment Summary Report	MoTI	Entire island rail corridor	Inventory of railroad assets and their conditions to create
2022	Vancouver Island Rail – Initial Business Case	ICF	Entire island rail corridor	Proposed business case for restoring passenger rail service.
2022	Island Rail Corridor Freight Analysis	MoTI	Entire island rail corridor	Analysis of existing freight rail services / facilities, and potential freight rail opportunities for the Island Rail Corridor
2024	Limited Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment	MoTI	Entire island rail corridor	Detailed typical assessment and remediation options for the railway corridor on Vancouver Island. Includes specific reports for First Nation communities (Snuneymuxw, Nanoose, Qualicum)
2003	*Track and Geotechnical Conditions Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway Assessment Report**	*Vancouver Island Rail Company*	*Entire island rail corridor*	*Assessment of track structure conditions for the Victoria Subdivision. This includes surface stability, erosion, culverts, ties, ballast, vegetation, rails, and grade crossings.*
2012	*Bridge Inspection and Assessment – E&N Railway**	*MoTI*	*Victoria Subdivision*	*Assessment of 48 bridges along the Victoria Subdivision. Load capacities were documented.*

*Shaded grey cells are studies that were not yet received for this study but were referenced as part of the 2020 Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment Report.

Evaluation of the E&N Railway Corridor: Foundation Report (MoTI, 2010)
In 2009, the Province of British Columbia committed to examine the viability of the E&N Railway Corridor on Vancouver Island. The purpose of this foundation report was to provide a summary of technical work performed that included an analysis of several business markets including freight, intercity passenger, tourist excursion, and commuter.

The foundation report noted that existing freight volumes at the time were about 900 railcars per year, and that market growth could be achieved with more frequent rail barge service to the Lower Mainland. At the time the report was published, Compliance Energy was proposing to develop the Raven Underground Coal Mine Project, to be located near Fanny Bay. Rail was under consideration as a potential way to transport the coal, allowing shipment to Port Alberni for overseas export by deep sea vessel. Market estimates indicated that 16,500 railcars per year of coal could be possible if this opportunity were to materialize. As of 2022, this proposed mine is no longer under development.

The foundation report also investigated opportunities for more efficient movement of forest products to North American markets as well as markets for construction aggregates moving intra-island. The foundation report noted that the principal challenge facing the E&N Corridor was a lack of re-investment. As of 2010, the Island Rail Corridor had the lowest annual traffic (and lowest per km freight volume) of any Canadian short line railway. In simple terms, rail traffic needs significant increase to sustain the ongoing operation and maintenance of the Island Rail Corridor, but this cannot happen without prior capital investment.

The foundation report concluded that without increasing volumes of freight and passenger service on Vancouver Island, continued reinvestment in rail infrastructure was not sustainable. Given that there are a variety of business opportunities that could emerge in this corridor, MoTI recommended that a corridor strategy be developed in partnership with ICF as a next step. The objective of the corridor strategy would be to determine what conditions and economic circumstances need to be in place to preserve the corridor for future use and encourage and enhance the potential opportunities for growth (further described in E&N Railway Corridor: Development Strategies for the Island Corridor Foundation (2010) report below).

Evaluation of the E&N Railway Corridor: Freight Analysis (MoTI, 2010)
This working paper presents the freight demand analysis undertaken as part of the Evaluation of the E&N Railway Corridor on Vancouver Island. It includes analysis of the potential freight revenues versus the costs needed to preserve and expand the existing freight rail service at the time.

The working paper noted that demand for inbound freight services is linked to population growth on Vancouver Island, whereas outbound demand is related to the competitiveness of locally produced materials and goods in North American and offshore markets. The dominance of trucking had left rail with remarkably low market share on Vancouver Island, with only 900 carloads handled by SVI in 2009. Compared to parallel truck movements on the Island Highway, rail accounted for less than one percent of freight traffic. Rail traffic in 2009 was concentrated between Duncan, Nanaimo, and Parksville – and included grain, propane, and fertilizer from Alberta, silicates from Quebec, and outbound poles destined for Ontario.

E&N Railway Corridor: Development Strategies for the ICF (MoTI, 2010)
This study built upon previous evaluations of the Island Rail Corridor and was sponsored and managed by MoTI on behalf of the ICF. The purpose of the study was to assist the ICF in identifying potential approaches to build towards the longer-term vision for the railway. This included strategies for passenger and commuter rail service, tourist train operations, freight rail development, and land use – all placed in the context of the estimated capital cost of rehabilitating the existing rail infrastructure. Specific to freight, the study identified the key market segments of mining, pulp and paper, concrete, and asphalt that may be conducive to rail transportation.

The study noted that any freight rail growth is dependent on the restoration of the rail corridor between Victoria and Courtenay, as well as between Parksville and Port Alberni. The study came to the following preliminary conclusions regarding freight rail:

- The greatest potential for freight rail volume growth is from industries located in the central portion of the corridor (between Duncan and Parksville), and possibly from industries located in Port Alberni.
- More freight volumes could be attracted from other modes if rail service was faster, frequent, and cost-competitive with trucking (provided that capital was invested to make these improvements to sections of the corridor where the new traffic would be carried). If the cost of fuel were to increase for trucking without having as great an impact on freight rail, then the cost comparison could improve in favour of rail at some point in the future.
- The existing freight market is fairly small and the cost of the needed track infrastructure improvements per ton of freight would be high.
- Notwithstanding the costs to achieve it, enhancing the freight and passenger rail services would reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions and improve energy efficiency on Vancouver Island.

Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment Summary Report (MoTI, 2020)
MoTI engaged WSP Canada Group Ltd. (WSP) to conduct a detailed evaluation of the base asset condition of the Island Rail Corridor on Vancouver Island. The assessment scope covered the entire length of the rail corridor, including Victoria to Courtenay, Parksville to Port Alberni, the Wellcox Spur, and the Wellcox Yard.

Condition assessments were built on previous studies prior to 2020. In addition, site investigations were undertaken to assess the condition of the Island Rail Corridor. During the site investigation, a good/fair/poor rating was applied at each inspection element to grade the overall condition of each component of the railway. Findings indicate that the Victoria Subdivision is in poor to fair condition and the Port Alberni Subdivision is in poor condition.

Conceptual cost estimates were developed to support three Improvement Phases evaluated based on use case: Initial, Intermediate, and Ultimate.

- Initial Phase – Track rehabilitated to Class 2 Track Standard (25 mph freight, 30 mph passenger) to accommodate up to four freight trains per day and up to four passenger trains per day.

- Intermediate Phase – Track rehabilitated to Class 3 Track Standard (40 mph freight, 60 mph passenger) and upgraded to support a maximum allowable gross weight capacity per carload of 286,000-lbs, to accommodate up to four freight trains per day and up to eight passenger trains per day.
- Ultimate Phase – Track rehabilitated to Class 3 Track Standard (40 mph freight, 60 mph passenger) and upgraded to support a maximum allowable gross weight capacity per carload of 286,000-lbs., plus additional improvements to the roadbed to improve ride quality, to accommodate up to four freight trains per day and at least eight passenger trains per day.

The estimated total cumulative costs to achieve each phase of restoration of the entire Island Rail Corridor network ranged from $320 M for the Initial Phase, $550 M for the Intermediate Phase, and $720 M for the Ultimate Phase.

The condition assessment did not consider a low-density freight-only scenario reflective of past operations in its proposed phasing. There are many comparable low-density short line freight railways that continue to operate successfully today with speeds as low as 10 mph. The total cost to rehabilitate all or a portion of the Island Rail Corridor network to accommodate renewed freight operations with 10 mph operations would certainly be less than the estimated total cost for the Initial Phase as outlined in the condition assessment.

Vancouver Island Rail – Initial Business Case (ICF, 2022)

In 2022, the ICF published a document that presents the business case for restoring freight and passenger rail service on the existing Island Rail Corridor. The initial business case draws on the Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment that was commissioned by the British Columbia Provincial Government in 2020 as the basis for the proposal. The initial business case is intended to be a decision-making tool to assess the strategic and economic rationale for restoring freight and passenger rail service to Vancouver Island. The initial business case provides for a robust commuter system operating within the Capital Regional District (CRD), intercity passenger trains, as well as freight operations.

The initial business case estimated annual revenues at $2.75 M for the conservative scenario, $4.40 M for the anticipated scenario, and $8.80 M for conservative and optimistic scenarios, respectively. These revenues are based on an assumed $1,100 revenue per car. The projected Island Rail Corridor freight revenue is summarized in **Table 3**.

Table 3. ICF Projected Island Rail Corridor Freight Revenue per Initial Business Case

Scenario	Annual Carloads	Revenue per Car	Total Annual Revenue
Conservative	2,500	$1,100	$2,750,000
Anticipated	4,000	$1,100	$4,400,000
Optimistic	8,000	$1,100	$8,800,000

Island Rail Corridor Freight Analysis (MoTI, 2022)

The study conducted detailed analysis of existing freight rail transportation services and facilities, freight rail demand, potential benefits of shifting freight onto rail, and potential future

opportunities for businesses to utilize freight rail as part of the multimodal transportation system on Vancouver Island.

If all of the most-likely opportunities were realized, the study estimated 4,500 to 11,400 annual carloads on the Island Rail Corridor could be achieved in the near to medium term. This is conditional of competitive rail shipping and handling fees to other modes. These rail opportunities could enable 10,400 to 25,600 annual truckloads to be taken off the roads on Vancouver Island, which is equivalent to an estimated 2 to 4 million truck kilometers per year. The shift would result in an annual greenhouse gas emissions savings of 1,700 to 3,600 metric tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year.

Island Railway Corridor Typical Railway Corridor Assessments and Remediation Options (MoTI, 2024)

The study consisted of an assessment and remediation options for the Island Railway Corridor on Vancouver Island. Reports were prepared to document potential soil, groundwater, and/or soil vapour contaminant between the Island Railway Corridor and each intersecting First Nation Reserve Lands along the corridor. First Nation Land Reserves assessed within the ACRD Rail Corridor Planning Study include Qualicum, Nanoose, and Snuneymuxw.

3.3 Rail

Ownership

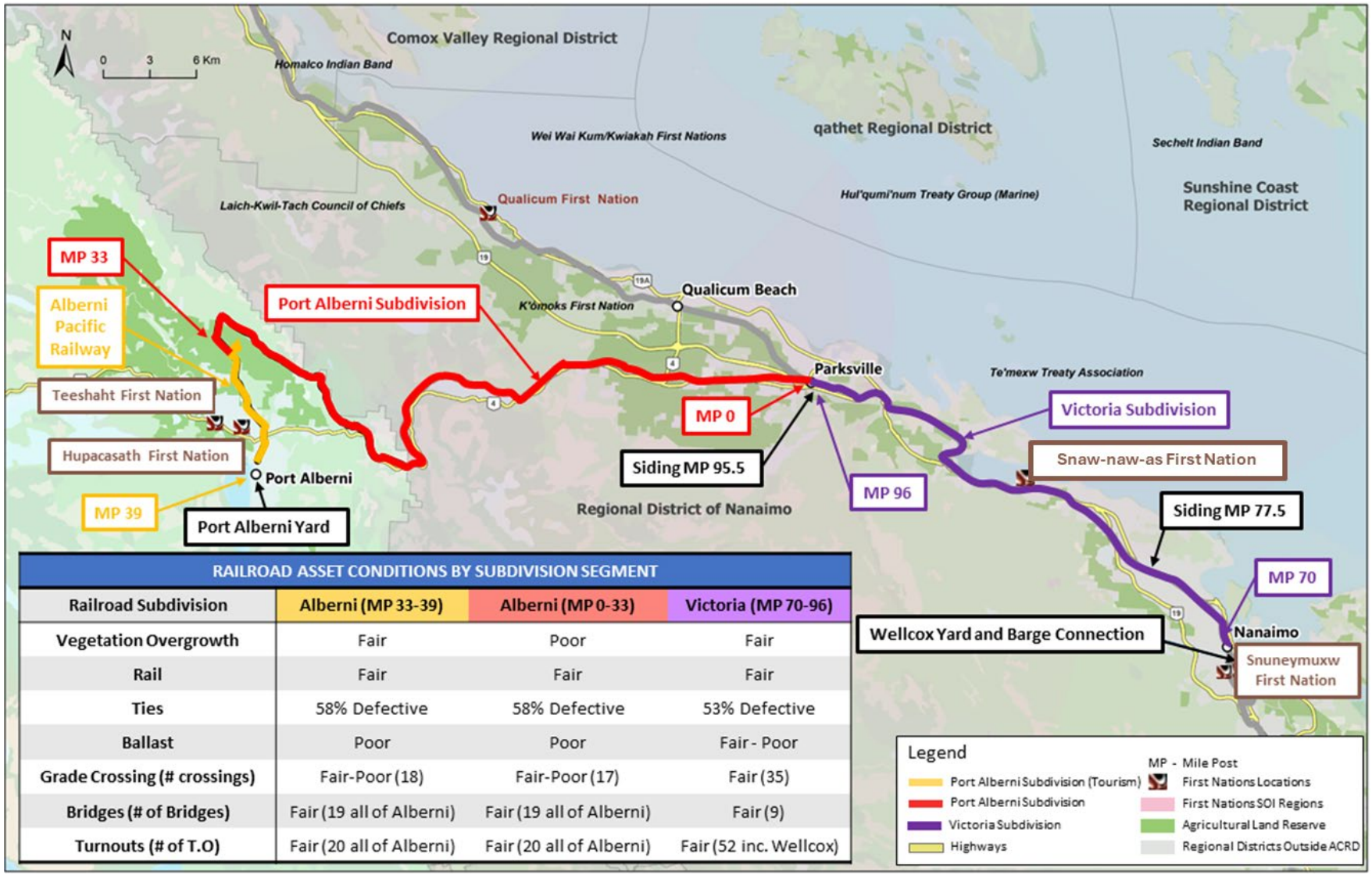
The nonprofit agency ICF currently owns and is responsible for management of railway assets and property on the historic E&N line since 2006. The ICF is comprised of a twelve-person board of directors, of whom five represent the regional districts, five represent First Nations, and two are members at large.[22] ICF contracts with SRY to operate and maintain the corridor. In 2023, a joint statement from Transport Canada and the Province of BC reverted a portion of E&N rail corridor land back to the Snaw-Naw-As First Nation. Based on this precedent, and guidance provided by ACRD, HDR is conducting this study with the understanding that the rail corridor, and planning of the rail corridor within the ACRD is under the combined jurisdiction / direction of ACRD, Tseshaht and Hupačasath First Nations. For this study, guidance from these bodies is provided through the Alberni Valley Rail Corridor Working Group (AVRCWG).

Rail Corridor Assets and Existing Conditions

In the Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment (2020 MoTI), conditions of the Island Rail Corridor trackage, including the segment within the study area, were inventoried. The report describes the conditions of all track segments discussed in this study from Nanaimo to Port Alberni, as well as additional information on the remaining segments on Victoria Subdivision. A rating scale was used to classify conditions on the corridor. Conditions listed as good indicate minor repairs are needed. Fair conditions indicate moderate risk of replacement or major rehabilitation, while rehabilitation can be expected when conditions are listed as poor. Victoria Subdivision (MP 70 – MP 96) between Nanaimo and Parksville shows as fair condition. Significant investment would be needed if regular and reliable rail operations were reinstated.

[22] Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment, MoTI 2020

Figure 5. Rail Infrastructure Conditions on Alberni and Victoria Subdivision Rail Corridors (Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment by MoTI 2020)



RAILROAD ASSET CONDITIONS BY SUBDIVISION SEGMENT

Railroad Subdivision	Alberni (MP 33-39)	Alberni (MP 0-33)	Victoria (MP 70-96)
Vegetation Overgrowth	Fair	Poor	Fair
Rail	Fair	Fair	Fair
Ties	58% Defective	58% Defective	53% Defective
Ballast	Poor	Poor	Fair - Poor
Grade Crossing (# crossings)	Fair-Poor (18)	Fair-Poor (17)	Fair (35)
Bridges (# of Bridges)	Fair (19 all of Alberni)	Fair (19 all of Alberni)	Fair (9)
Turnouts (# of T.O)	Fair (20 all of Alberni)	Fair (20 all of Alberni)	Fair (52 inc. Wellcox)

Port Alberni Subdivision (MP 0 – MP 33) between Parksville and the turnoff towards McLean Mill National Historic Site has not been used for two decades. Track conditions are listed as poor with reports of heavy overgrowth, rockslides, and deteriorating track structure. Port Alberni Subdivision (MP 33 – 39) terminates in Port Alberni and is being used by an operating tourist railway that takes passengers to the McLean Mill from Port Alberni. Conditions are fair and significant improvements would need to be made if additional rail operations were to be reinstated.

It is noted that HDR has not validated or confirmed the conditions of the rail corridor or trackage within the study area at this time of writing.

To understand how the rail corridor can be best utilized, a brief analysis of railroad right of way (ROW) widths was done. Railroad ROW is historically 30.5 meters (100 ft). Official ROW documents were not available; therefore, Google imagery was used to estimate the ROW. **Figure 6** shows the estimated railroad ROW between Port Alberni and Nanaimo. Within Port Alberni, the ROW)is generally 30.5 m (100 ft) with certain residential areas having significant encroachment on railroad property. Encroachment is seen in the form of non-permitted driveways, temporary structures, etc. Along the Port of Alberni, the ROW narrows from 15.2 m (50 ft) to as little as 7.3 m (24 ft). Moving east, towards Parksville from Port Alberni, there is a minimum of 30.5 m (100 ft) ROW. Nanoose also has 30.5 m (100 ft) ROW in most locations but along the ocean on the eastern most part of the line, the ROW narrows to as little as 15.2 m (50 ft). The railroad ROW within Nanaimo varies between 24.4 m (80 ft) and 30.5 m (100 ft) within residential areas but narrows significantly within the downtown area to as little as 10.7 m (35 ft) up to a maximum of 15.2 m (50 ft). North of downtown Nanaimo the E&N Trail shares the ROW from Eberts St to Mostar St for about 7.5 km. The trail passes over the rail line several times. As the ROW approaches Wellcox Yard, the ROW varies between 30.5 m (100 ft) and 10 m (32.6 ft) because of being close to the ocean or houses being adjacent to the track.

Figure 6. Estimated Railroad Right of Way Between Port Alberni and Nanaimo

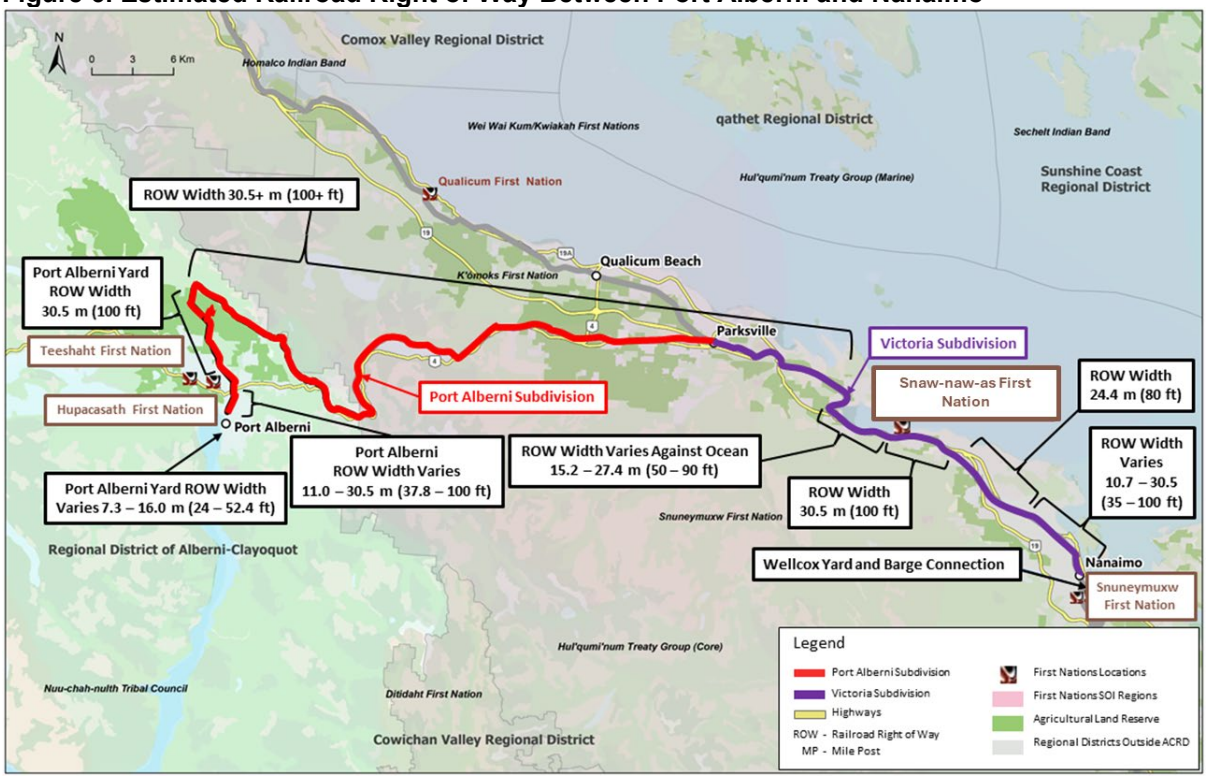
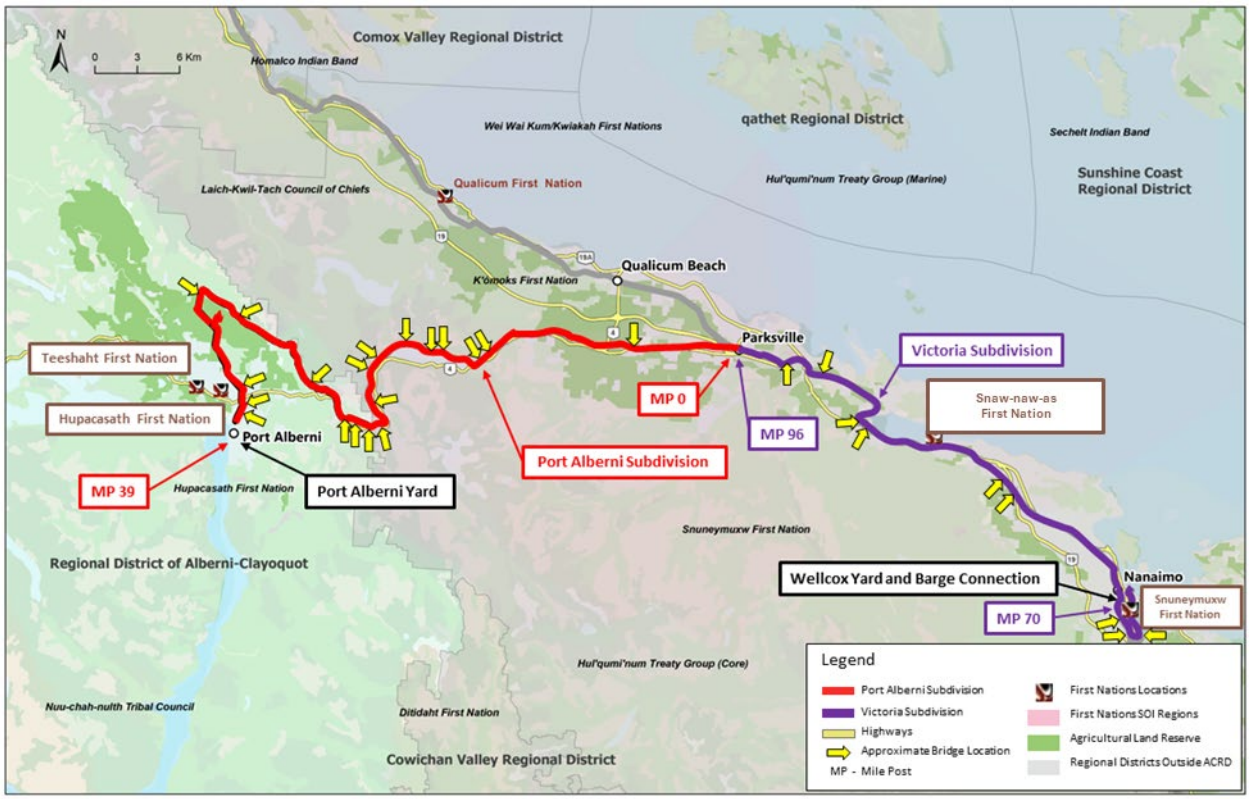


Figure 7 shows the many bridge assets along the proposed rail corridor. Nineteen bridges have been identified on the Port Alberni Subdivision but have not been structurally analysed in detail. It is recommended that further investigation into the load capacity and general conditions of these assets takes place. On the Victoria Subdivision, there is an estimated 9 bridges along the rail corridor. The Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment (MoTI, 2012) reported all bridges on the Victoria Subdivision as supporting a load rating of 186,000 lb rail cars, well above any passenger train car. If increased freight loads were expected, then structural analysis may need to be conducted in greater detail. In addition, several bridges have speed restrictions of 10, 15, or 20 mph. Clearance heights were not reported as a major issue on this segment, but it was noted that MoTI has a standard of 5m clearance under the rail bridge and that some historic infrastructure may not meet this requirement. Further investigation should be conducted to ensure roadways passing under railroad infrastructure have sufficient clearance.

Figure 7. Approximate Locations of Railroad Bridges



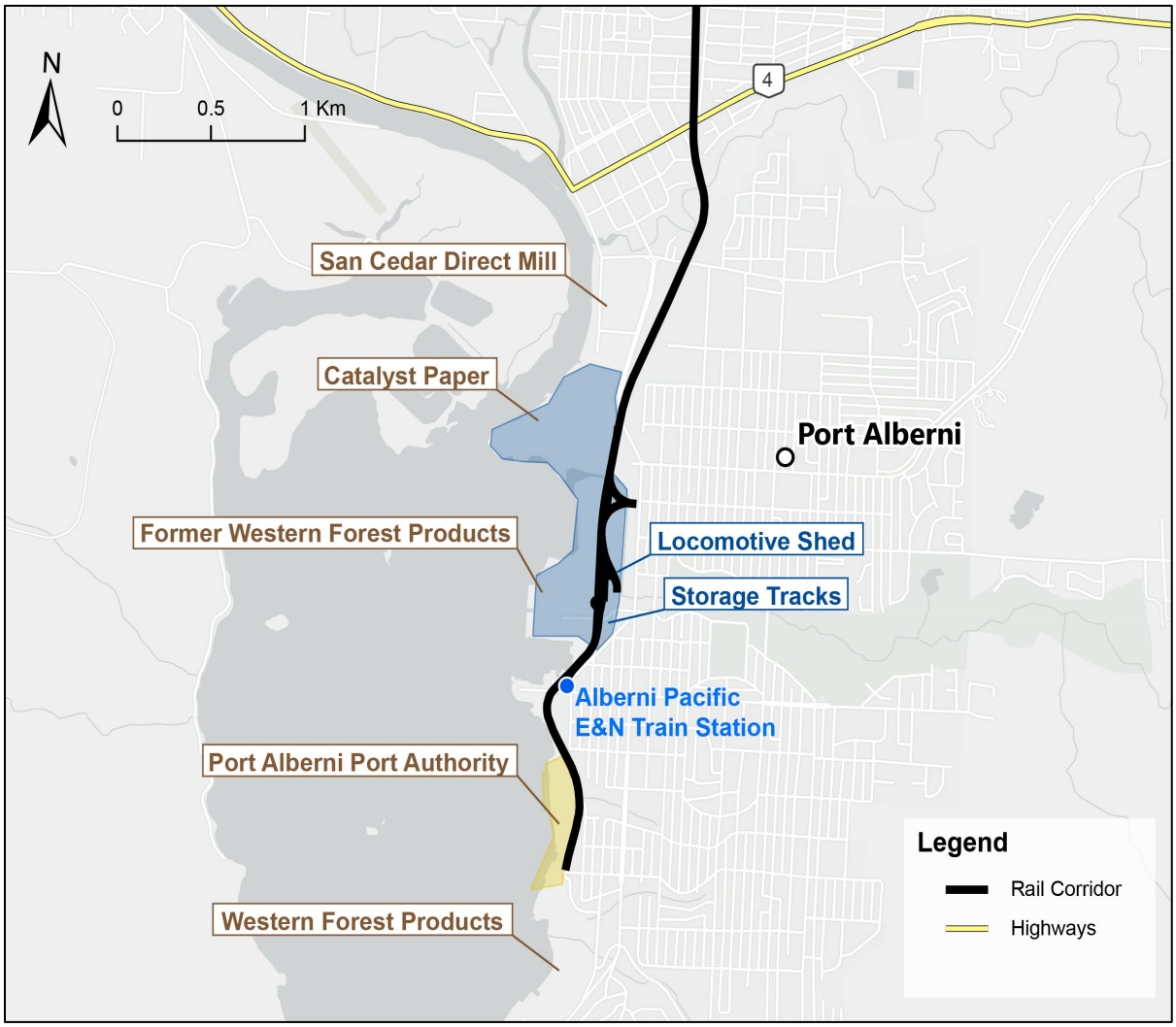
The Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment (MoTI, 2012) reported the condition of assets along the affected corridor. All turnouts were reported to be in fair condition with cross tie replacement cited as the reason for their rating. In total, there are about 70 grade crossings along the main line track between Nanaimo and Port Alberni with 22 more on spur lines along the affected corridor all listed as in fair or poor condition. Ballast is largely filled with sediment and vegetation which degrades its function for drainage during weather events. One washout on the Victoria Subdivision at MP 84.4 prevents trains running through this section. Railroads can operate on defective ties which are spaced out along the track, but given field conditions, defective ties would likely need to be replaced within a short timeframe if service were to be re-instated. Other track hardware may need to be upgraded, such as, single shoulder tie plates changed for double shoulder tie plates and joint bars.

Other notable rail infrastructure includes sidings and yards. Nanaimo has an active freight yard called Wellcox Yard that has transloading and barge operations operated by Seaspan. There are 9 storage tracks about 300 m in length with additional tracks being used for transloading operations for commodities such as grain, fly ash, calcium carbonate, and latex. On the Victoria Subdivision between Nanaimo and Parksville are two passing sidings. The passing siding at MP 70.5 has one 200 m siding track. At MP 95.5 there are two siding tracks about 170 m in length.

Figure 8 shows the current rail infrastructure in the City of Port Alberni. Shown are nearby businesses and assets formerly served by rail. Several rail assets remain in Port Alberni Yard including the former E&N station, 5 storage tracks ranging from 150 to 300 m in length, and a

650 m^2 locomotive shed. The buildings at Port Alberni Yard have not been formally assessed but appear to be in working condition.

Figure 8. Port Alberni Businesses Adjacent to Alberni Subdivision.



Encumbrances

There are many encumbrances along the proposed rail corridor. In the context of this railroad corridor, encumbrances are typically easements crossing perpendicular or infrastructure running parallel to the tracks. Although there are likely many undocumented instances, there are 13 types of recorded encumbrances on the Port Alberni Subdivision. In total, 118 encumbrances have been documented there, with the most common being wire crossings. Similarly, 13 common types of encumbrances have been identified on the Victoria Subdivision between Parksville and Nanaimo. Of the 383 documented encumbrances within the segment of the Victoria Subdivision, the most frequent encumbrance is also wire crossings.

Potential Freight Rail Customers

The Island Rail Corridor Analysis study documented existing freight rail activity on the island and identified potential freight rail customers and carload volumes that could be realized if

freight rail service were reinstated. There are currently around 1,000 to 1,500 rail carloads moved on the island annually with the majority of carloads being transloaded at Wellcox Yard and the remainder being propane cars delivered to Superior Propane north of the city center. The analysis identified the potential for up to an additional 11,400 carloads of traffic per year on Vancouver Island in the near to medium term. **Table 4** shows the potential commodities that could make up this additional carload traffic volumes. These volumes exclude landlocked operations in Harmac and Crofton which have barge operations that do not currently connect to the rail corridor in this study.

Table 4. Potential Inbound and Outbound Commodities

Region	Inbound	Outbound
Port Alberni	• Calcium Carbonate (Slurry) • Hydrogen Peroxide • Kaolin Clay (Slurry) • Latex • Sodium Chlorate • Starch • Sulfuric Acid • Wholesale	• Lumber • Paper • Veneer
Parksville	• Aluminum Sulfate • Asphalt • Biodiesel • Cement • Ethanol • Methanol • Petroleum • Scrap Metal	
Entire Island	• Aggregate • Containers • Fruit • Grain • Livestock • Rip-Rap • Trailers • Vegetables • Woodchips • Wholesale • Propane	• Aggregate • Containers • Fruit • Livestock • Rip-Rap • Trailers • Vegetables • Woodchips • Wholesale

Historically, paper production in Port Alberni constituted most carloads on the island. Paper Excellence is the current owner of the paper mill in Port Alberni, and they could potentially benefit from reinstated rail service (due to the potentially lower shipping costs compared to trucking and the fact that much of their traffic moves by rail on the mainland anyways). In addition, lumber provides strong potential in both processed and unprocessed products. To a lesser extent, agriculture, mining, retail and wholesale products could be transported by rail. **Table 5** shows a list of possible freight rail customers / commodities both in Port Alberni, and on the Island in general.

Table 5. Potential Customers Served by Reinstated Freight Rail Service

Company	Commodity	Location
Paper Excellence	Paper Products & Papermaking inputs	Port Alberni
Western Forest Products	Lumber Products	Port Alberni
San Group Global Forestry Products	Lumber Products	Port Alberni
Long Hoh Enterprises Canada Ltd	Lumber Products	Qualicum Beach
Coastland Wood Industries	Veneer Products	Nanaimo
Various Stakeholders	Unprocessed Lumber	Various
Various Stakeholders	Livestock, Fruits, Vegetables	Various
Various Stakeholders	Retail & Wholesale Imports	Various

3.4 Multi-modal Transportation

In addition to considering reinstating the Island Rail Corridor for rail service, there is also the potential for the corridor to support other modes of transportation, such as auto, bus transit, or active modes (walking and cycling). This section discusses all other relevant non-rail modes of transportation within the study area, in order to provide context for the consideration using the rail corridor to support other modes of travel.

Road Network

Highway 4 (or the Alberni Highway / Pacific Rim Highway) is the largest east-west provincial highway on Vancouver Island. The road generally runs parallel to the Port Alberni Subdivision, with the exception of the corridor within the ACRD. The road is predominantly a 2 lane cross section and connects Parksville and Port Alberni, with a western terminus at Tofino. Typical speeds along provincial highways such as Highway 4 should be 80 km/h according to the British Columbia Motor Vehicle Act[23]. On segments with sharp, blind turns, such as near Cameron Lake, there are posted speed advisory signs of 60 km/h. In 2018, the Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) along Highway 4 within the study area was approximately 10,000 vehicles, with higher volumes near Parksville. Summer volumes are typically observed to be approximately 10% higher near Port Alberni and 40% near Parksville.[24]

EMERGENCY DETOUR ROUTE INVESTIGATIONS

Highway 4 is the only major road connection between the ACRD and the communities to the west with the rest of Vancouver Island. This leaves these communities vulnerable to disruption events (fires, floods, earthquakes, etc.) that could sever the use of Highway 4, and thus the main access for people and goods to the ACRD.

To address this, HDR understands that MoTI will be exploring and conducting cost estimates for up to three potential emergency routes to the region (including routes near Horn Lake and Cowichan Lake). It is noted that the potential utility of the rail corridor as an emergency route for goods (and potentially vehicle travel) will depend on whether or not alternate road routes are developed to/from the region.

[23] bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96318_05#section146
[24] Traffic Data Program (gov.bc.ca)

ROAD CLOSURES

Road closure data for Highway 4 between Port Alberni and Parksville was obtained from DriveBC for 2016 to 2024 and summarized in **Table 6**. Within the past 9 years, there have been nearly 30 road closures where Highway 4 has been closed in both directions. The cause of road closure includes vehicle incidents, road maintenance, falling rock/debris, and wildfires. The average duration of road closure has been approximately 6.5 hours, with the longest road closure being 3 days in May 2019 near Koen Road due to a vehicle incident. There may be an opportunity for the rail corridor and/or rail service to provide an alternative mode to move people and goods to the region during times when Highway 4 is closed.

Table 6. Summary of Full Road Closures on Highway 4 between Port Alberni and Parksville (2016 to 2024)

Year	Number of Full Road Closures in the Year	Average Full Road Closure Duration (hours)
2016	0	-
2017	0	-
2018	2	10.7
2019	6	13.9
2020	2	1.6
2021	7	3.4
2022	4	3.2
2023	6	6.2
2024 (until February)	1	4.4
Average (2018 to 2023)	**5**	**6.5**

Transit Network

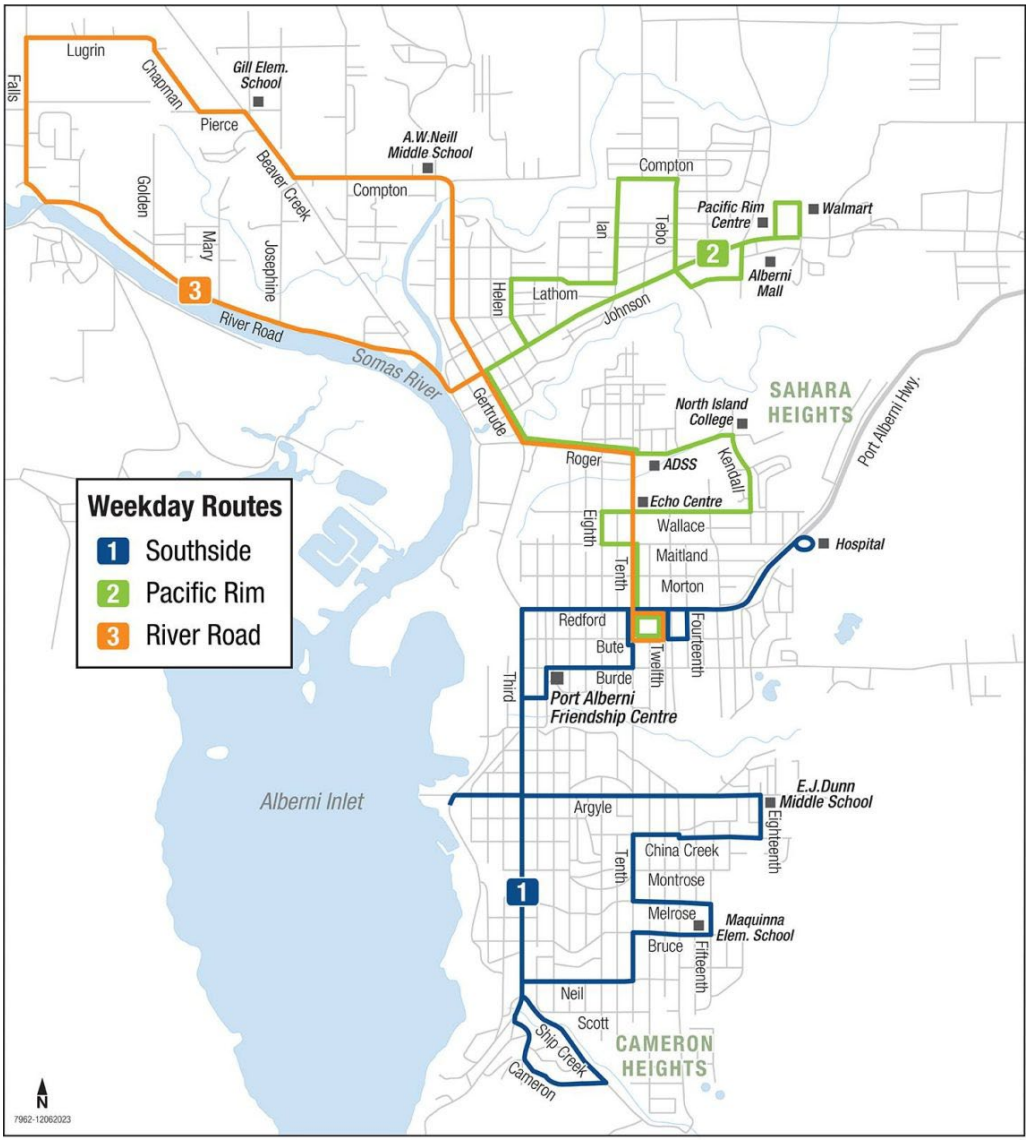
BCTransit currently operates 4 local routes within Port Alberni that all originate from Redford Street and 10th Avenue plaza. The 3 weekday routes and 1 evening route are summarized in **Table 7** and the routing is shown in **Figure 9**.

There are also service providers such as Vancouver Island Connector and IslandLinkBus who provide regional bus transit trips on Vancouver Island, including connections between Port Alberni and Parksville. There are currently 3 departures per day on some days of the week. Trips take upwards of an hour per direction (between Port Alberni and Parksville)

Table 7. BCTransit Routes in Port Alberni

Route	Frequency	Day of Week	Time	Origin	Destination
Southside	40 min	Monday to Saturday	7 AM to 7 PM	Reford Road/ Tenth Avenue	Cameron Heights
Pacific Rim	40 min	Monday to Saturday	7 AM to 7 PM	Reford Road/ Tenth Avenue	Alberni Mall
River Road	40 min	Monday to Saturday	7 AM to 7 PM	Reford Road/ Tenth Avenue	Georgia Road / Falls Street
Crosstown	90 min	All Days	Mon-Sat: 7 PM to 10 PM Sun: 9 AM to 7 PM	Reford Road/ Tenth Avenue	Cameron Heights, Alberni Mall, and Georgia Road / Falls Street

Figure 9. Primary BCTransit Routes in Port Alberni



Source: BCTransit , Note: The Crosstown route (not shown) runs Monday-Saturday evenings and Sundays, and is a combination of all three routes shown.

The Port of Port Alberni

The Port of Port Alberni is the closest Canadian port to the Pacific Rim. It is operated by the Port Alberni Port Authority (PAPA) and primarily exports forest products including raw logs and lumber for international markets[25].

The Island Rail Corridor connects to the Port of Alberni and the Port of Nanaimo, and could be used to support port-related freight traffic if rail service were re-instated.

PAPA is currently working on advancing the Port Alberni Trans-Shipment Hub (PATH) project[26], which would be a large intermodal container terminal that would be able to accommodate large ocean-going container vessels. PAPA claims that the facility could help improve trade efficiency on the west coast and divert container traffic from the congested Lower Mainland road network.

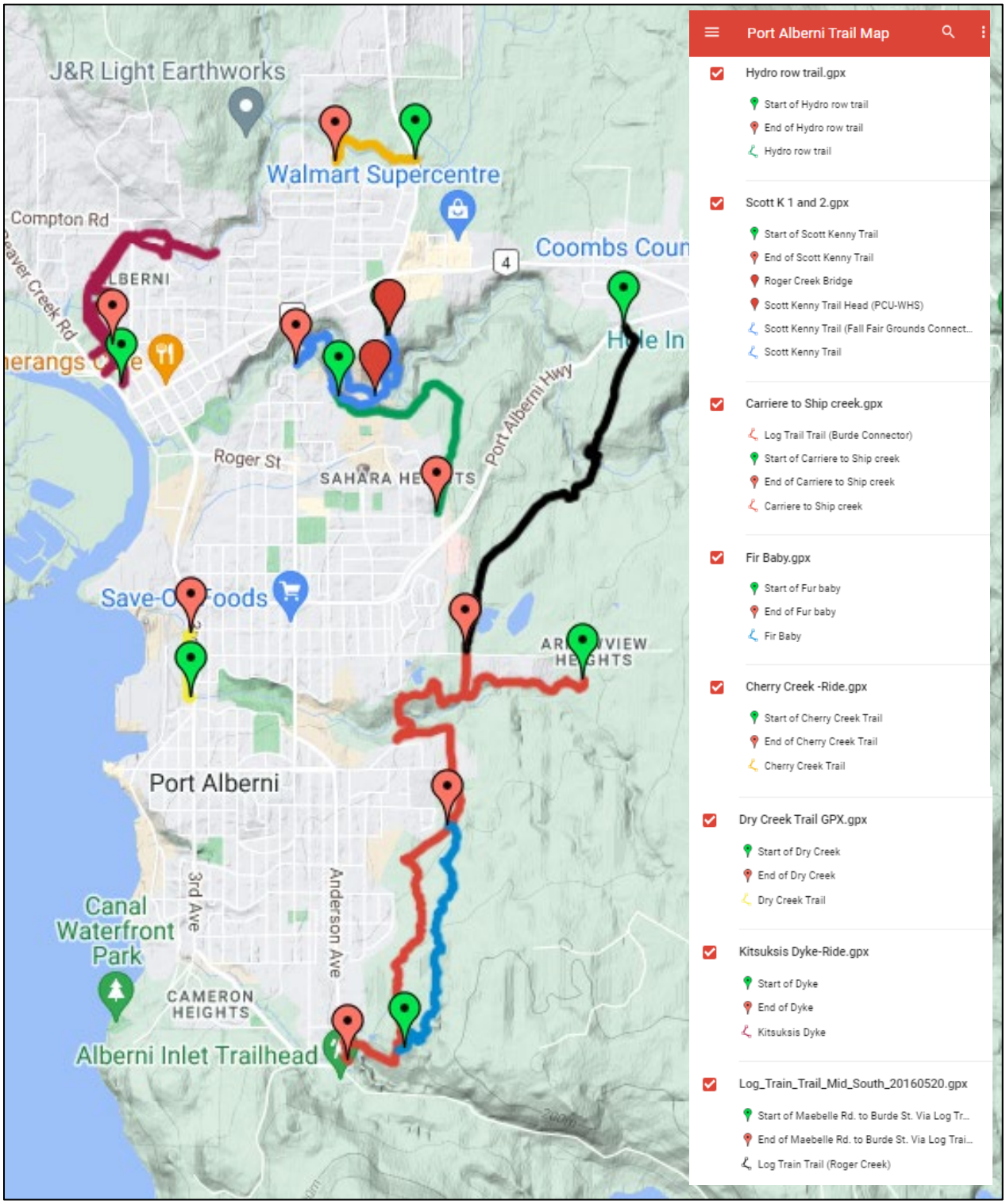
Active Transportation Network

There are currently no major active transportation trails connecting Port Alberni and Parksville. **Figure 10** shows the published trails within the City of Port Alberni, which includes a number of different trail segments. It is noted that many of the trails are disconnected from one another, and do not form an interconnected network.

Sidewalks are available along many streets within the City of Port Alberni, and provide connections to the trail network.

[25] Island Rail Corridor Freight Analysis, MoTI, 2022
[26] https://pathbc.ca/

Figure 10. Port Alberni Trails



Source: Port Alberni, https://playinpa.ca/trails-info/

4. Future Conditions

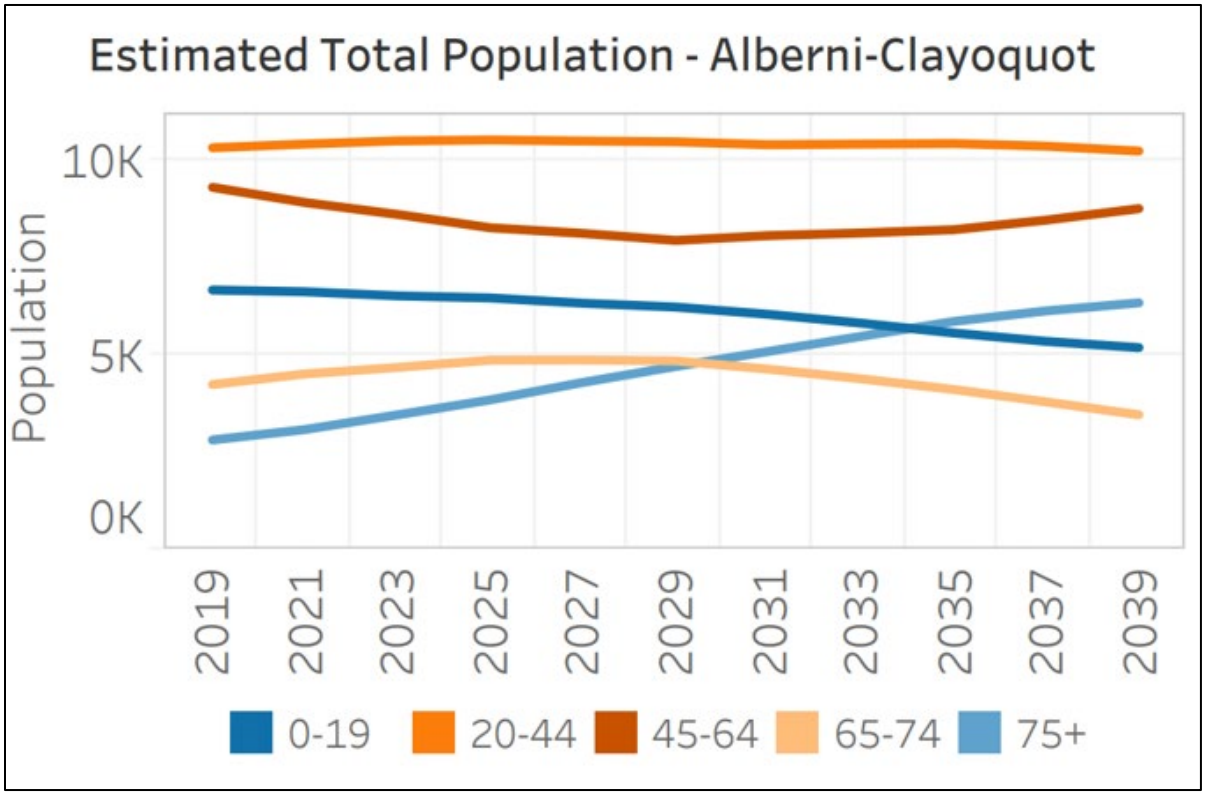
4.1 Population Growth

Population in Port Alberni is expected to grow by nearly 20% from 18,000 to 23,200 people between 2024 and 2042.[27] As a region, the ACRD is not expected to have significant growth and is only forecast to experience an increase of 1,000 people from 33,000 to 34,000 people by 2038.[28] The future forecasts suggest a projected population declination outside of Port Alberni within the ACRD.

Total population within the ACRD by age group is summarized in **Figure 11**. While population in the ACRD is expected to remain consistent, there will be growth in the number of people within the 75+ age group. Similarly, the younger age groups are expected to decrease slightly.

Population within the RDN is expected to grow by at least 25% from 172,000 to 216,000 people by 2041. Similar to the ACRD, the 75+ age group is expected to grow the most within this region.

Figure 11. Population Growth in ACRD by Age Group



Source: ACRD Local Health Profile

[27] https://www.letsconnectpa.ca/ocp
[28] https://www.islandhealth.ca/sites/default/files/alberni-clayoquot-local-health-area-profile.pdf

4.2 Economic Development

According to the ACRD's OCP, the general planning goals of the Cherry Creek area include continuing social and economic growth, promoting agricultural industries in Alberni Village, and ensuring development within the Alberni Highway and Port Alberni Highway corridors support tourism in Alberni Valley. There is also potential to permit extraction of mineral and aggregate deposits in the area to support economic development. The Cherry Creek area is highly forested and can provide additional economic activity and employment. It is noted that Port Alberni's main water source is also located within these forestry lands.

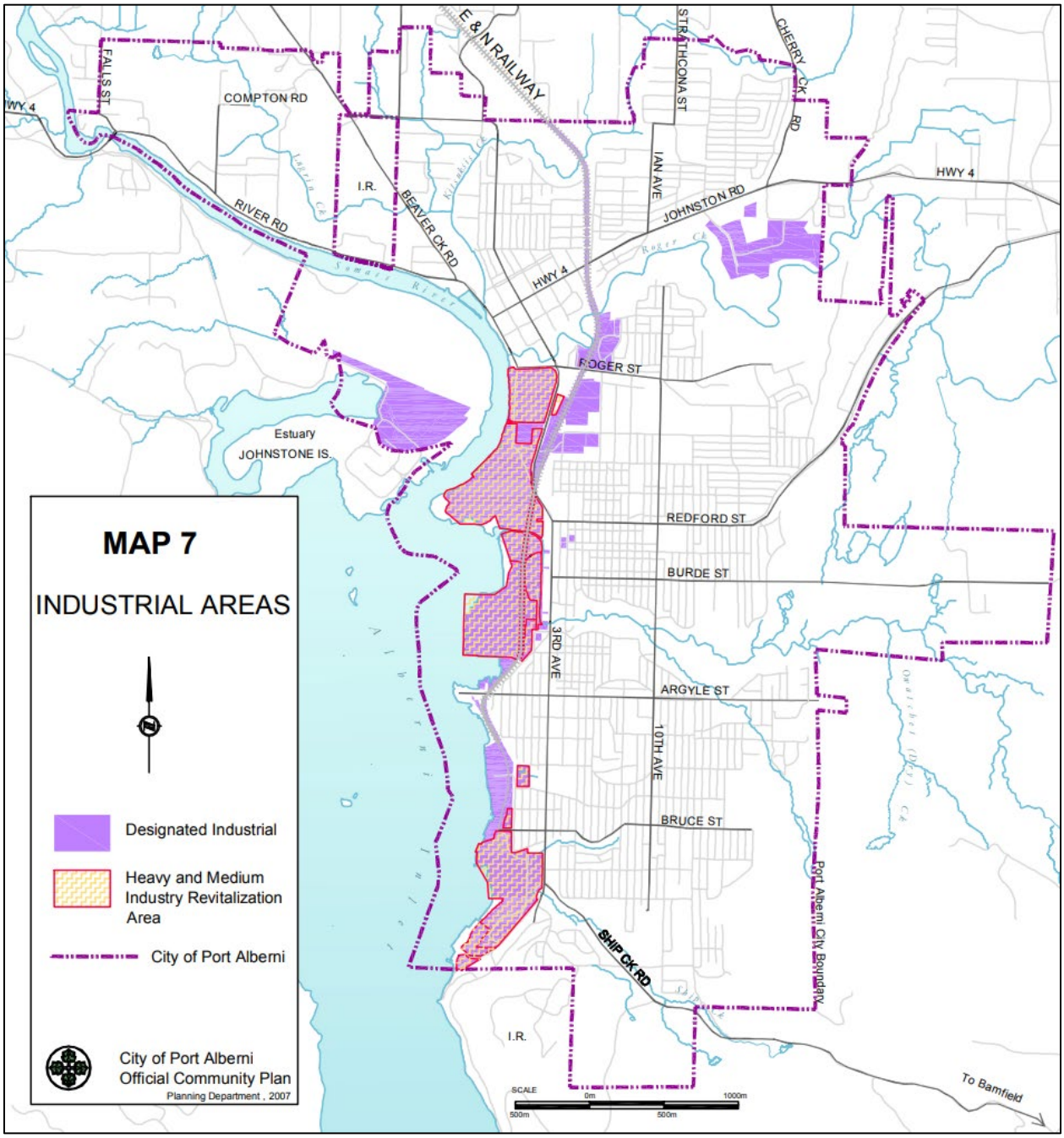
The Port Alberni OCP identifies economic opportunities to strengthen Port Alberni's status as a regional centre for the Alberni Valley for institutional, commercial, and recreational uses. The Port Alberni OCP also indicates collaborative opportunities with the Tseshaht and Hupacasath First Nation groups on economic development initiatives. As of 2023, the Tseshaht and Hupačasath First Nations are currently working together with the City of Port Alberni to develop a master plan for a new development at the Clutesi Haven Marina in Port Alberni. The new master plan will support the development of a shared land use vision for all groups involved and will be integrated into the Port Alberni's OCP.[29]

The Tseshaht First Nation does not have any official documentation for economic development plans. However, the provincial government granted approximately $14 M for 153 projects in 2019 to the Tseshaht as part of efforts to boost economic development and recreational opportunities in rural British Columbia communities. These projects include exploring developing lands for port-related projects, self-storage facilities, and small warehousing and logistics centers.[30] The Hupačasath First Nation is currently in the process of developing a Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) that will identify opportunities for the community.

In Port Alberni, the E&N Railway directly serves the major industrial area located near the Alberni Inlet. As shown in **Figure 12**, the OCP identifies several industrial revitalization areas near the E&N Railway that could support new industries to revitalize the industrial waterfront. The OCP also indicates that Port Alberni is exploring the potential of the E&N Railway corridor as a major greenway linkage between Northport and Southport.

[29] https://hashilthsa.com/news/2023-07-12/tseshaht-hupacasath-and-city-work-new-vision-clutesi-haven-marina
[30] https://hashilthsa.com/news/2020-07-28/tseshaht-eyes-economic-growth-through-land-development

Figure 12. Industrial Areas in Port Alberni



Source: City of Port Alberni Official Community Plan

4.3 Planned Infrastructure

In addition to expected population growth and economic development opportunities identified in Port Alberni, some of the planned transportation improvements within the study area and broader ACRD region include the following:

- The OCPs for Port Alberni, ACRD, and RDN all identify the need to develop a Trail Network Master Plan to provide an integrated network of trails that connect both within the governing body and adjacent areas.
- There is a proposed widening of 1.5 km segment of Highway 4 near Kennedy Lake between Port Alberni and Tofino. Improvements will include road widening to accommodate two full lanes (one per direction) and paved shoulders, and horizontal realignment to improve sightlines.

5. Summary

Originally developed by the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway, the Island Rail Corridor was first built between Nanaimo and Esquimalt in 1886, and later extended to Port Alberni in 1910. Rail service was operated within the ACRD and to Port Alberni for decades. On the Port Alberni Subdivision, passenger service was curtailed in 1953 and freight operations ceased in 2002. In 2023, Transport Canada and the Province of British Columbia reverted a portion of the rail corridor back to Snaw-Naw-As First Nation, and allocated $18 million to support future corridor planning in partnership with First Nations and regional districts on the island.

The ACRD, in partnership with the Tseshaht and Hupačasath First Nations, are now exploring opportunities to use the rail corridor, including for passenger / freight rail service, and/or other potential uses.

Highway 4 is the only major road connection to the communities within the ACRD and further west, and it has experienced regular closures due to collisions and other events that have impacted the flow of people and goods to the region. The rail corridor could potentially provide an opportunity to improve the connections for passenger and freight transportation (and potentially other uses) to the ACRD and communities with it, as well as supporting the economic development (tourism, industry, etc.) aspirations for the region.

The rail infrastructure within the study area is understood to be in in poor to fair condition (considering the vegetation overgrowth, rail, ties, and ballast conditions), and significant improvements would be required to re-instate rail service, and/or repurpose the corridor for other uses.

The next portion of the study will focus on identifying transportation and economic development needs for the community, and opportunities for improvement that could be supported by the rail corridor.